

## **Environmental Modifications**

**Definition:** Those physical adaptations to the individual's primary residence, required by the individual's plan of care, which are necessary to ensure the health, welfare and safety of the individual, or which enable the individual to function with greater independence, and without which, the individual would require institutionalization. Home is defined as non-government subsidized living quarters and modifications to any government subsidized housing (i.e., group homes or community residential care facilities) are not permitted. Such adaptations may include the installation of ramps and grab-bars, widening of doorways, modification of bathroom facilities, or installation of specialized electric and plumbing systems, which are necessary to accommodate the medical equipment and supplies which are necessary for the welfare of the individual. Environmental Modifications may also include consultation and assessments to determine the specific needs and follow-up inspections upon completion of the project.

Excluded are those adaptations or improvements to the home which are of general utility, and are not of direct medical or remedial benefit to the individual, such as carpeting, painting, roof repair, central air conditioning, etc. Adaptations that add square footage to the home are excluded from this benefit. All services shall be provided in accordance with applicable State or local building codes. Approval of a request for environmental modification is a multi-step process. The modification is initially determined by you based on the individual's need as documented in the plan of care. Three bids for the modification are obtained by you and submitted with documentation of the need. The consultation/assessment does not require the submission of bids. This information is reviewed by South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (SCDDSN) staff for programmatic integrity and cost effectiveness.

**Please note:** Environmental modifications are not intended to provide financial assistance for any phase of new home construction or major home renovation projects. Routine and one-time home maintenance is the sole responsibility of the homeowner or landlord (e.g. siding, repairs/replacement, gutter work, foundation repair, electrical wiring problems, etc.)

The following are examples of possible adaptations that may be done as a part of Environmental Modifications (this list is not all inclusive):

- installation of a ramp to facilitate safe and easy entering and exiting of the home.
- installation of grab-bars.
- porch lift to facilitate safe and easy entering and exiting of the home (in certain situations a porch lift can be more feasible and cost effective than extensive ramping).
- widening of doorways to allow functional entry into the home, bathroom, bedrooms, etc.
- flooring modifications to facilitate easier propelling of a manual wheelchair (e.g. carpet is replaced with vinyl floor covering).
- modification of bathroom facilities to provide a more accessible means of maintaining personal hygiene, and better independence and safety in bathing and grooming (e.g. wider bathroom door with lever hardware, a roll-in shower with customized grab bars, roll-under sink, etc.).
- installation of specialized electric and plumbing systems which are necessary to accommodate the medical equipment and supplies which are necessary for the welfare of the individual.

**Providers:** Services can be provided by a SC Department of Health and Human Services enrolled licensed contractor or a DDSN contracted Board/provider DDSN/DSN Boards/contracted providers or by those enrolled with SCDHHS as providers of Environmental Modifications.

Environmental Assessments/Consultations must be provided by licensed Medicaid enrolled Occupational or Physical Therapists, Medicaid enrolled Rehabilitation Engineering Technologists, Assistive Technology Practitioners and Assistive Technology Suppliers certified by the Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North

American (RESNA), Medicaid enrolled Environmental Access/Consultants/contractors certified by Professional Resource in Management (PRIME).

**Arranging for the Service:** When modifications are thought to be needed and before proceeding with bid requests, the **Environmental Modifications Fact Sheet for Individuals Who Live in Privately Owned or Rented Homes (Community Supports Info Sheet-2)** must be given to the individual and/or legal guardian. The information included in this fact sheet should be explained fully.

There are two options for completing Environmental Modifications from which the participant/legal guardian may choose:

1. The participant/family may choose to have the SCDDSN Professional Design Team (PDT) complete the modification specifications using State Funds. If this option is selected, the PDT will also complete the procurement process.
2. The participant/family may also choose to arrange their own waiver funded Environmental Modification Assessment and work with their Waiver Case Manager to follow procurement. If the participant/legal guardian chooses to bypass the SCDDSN PDT process for completing an Environmental Modification, the participant/legal guardian must sign the Release of Liability form.

Once the individual's specific need has been identified and documented in the Plan and it is determined that Environmental Modification is the appropriate service to meet the need, the scope of the work/specifications must be determined. This should be done in consultation with the individual and/or family and should define the expected modification as clearly as possible, including measurements and specific materials to be used. The expected modifications can be defined by obtaining an Environmental Modification Consultation.

Environmental Modification Consultations are requested by entering the cost for the consultation onto the Waiver Tracking System under Environmental Modifications (\$26). Consultations do not require the submission of bids; however, the cost cannot exceed \$600.00/consultation. Once approved, the consultation must be authorized using the **Authorization for Service (Community Supports Form EM-8)** which directs the provider to bill the local DSN Board. Consultations **cannot** be billed directly to South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Once the scope of the modification has been determined and put in writing either by you or independent consultation, a listing of available contractors should be shared with the individual/family or the individual should be made aware of the qualifications for contractors and asked to select contractors to give at list three written bids. This offering of choice of provider must be documented in the individual's file. The individual/agency that completes the Assessment/Consultation is ineligible to bid on the actual modification.

When obtaining written bids for needed environmental modifications, if the modifications include a ramp, ramp repair, widening of doorways and/or interior floor surface modifications, the requirements noted below must be adhered to when the contractor is preparing the bid and later when the project is initiated and completed. This information must be given to the individual and/or family and must be provided to the contractors when requesting at least three written bids. Furthermore, the written specifications for the project that were developed with the individual/family by you or independent consultant must be provided to each contractor and each contractor's bid must be based on these specifications.

## **1. Ramps**

Any ramp that is contracted through the Community Supports Waiver must meet the following minimum requirements or comply with ANSI A117.1-1998.

Materials: The use of treated lumber (rated for ground contact) is required throughout the ramp (local building codes may be more specific as to the level of treatment in the lumber). Earth berming, used in conjunction with ramping is permissible due to uneven terrain.

Width: The usable platform width of all ramps must be a minimum of 36" (thirty-six inches).

Slope: The slope or grade of the ramp must be no less than 1' (one foot) of linear ramp for every 1" (one inch) of height that is to be ascended.

Designs: Fold-back (180 degree or 90 degree) turn designs are permissible. At each point where the ramp's direction changes there must be a functional turning platform with adequate space for the individual's mobility device to safely brake and/or change directions.

Wheelchair Turning Platforms/Landings: All turning platforms or "landings" (usually at the top end of the ramp or where the ramp changes directions) that lead directly into the home must be a minimum of 5' x 5' (five feet by five feet) for a safe functional space to turn and enter the home. At any exterior entry/exit door, the turning platform should start at the hinged side of the door and extend beyond the latch side of the door to best utilize the available space to turn and maneuver a wheelchair.

Decking Material: All decking boards must be of sufficient thickness to maximize strength, provide stability, and maximize the life of the ramp.

Railings: All ramps should include handrails with pickets or other designs that will prevent wheelchairs from accidentally rolling off the sloped surface of the ramp.

Support Structures: Where it is necessary such as soft grass, soil, sand, loose gravel or muddy areas, or as local building codes dictate, all the ramp support posts and turning platform support posts shall be set in concrete for long-term stability.

Landing Pads: At the lower or ground end of the ramp, and where necessary such as soft grass, soil, sand, loose gravel or muddy areas, ramps shall include a concrete minimum 4'x4' (four feet by four feet) landing pad, for function and safety. Ramps that end, for example, onto a hardened surface or a concrete driveway usually do not require a concrete landing pad.

### Repairs to Existing Ramps

If the project is to simply repair an existing ramp that is in unsatisfactory condition, the repairs must not in any way bring a ramp out of accessibility compliance regulations or exceed the cost of replacing the ramp with a new one.

## **2. Widening Doorways/Installing Door Hardware**

Width: Whenever possible, a doorway must always be expanded to three (3) feet (or a 3'0" doorway). The 3 (three) foot door allows better function for a wider variety of mobility devices and can usually accommodate upgraded wheelchair prescriptions. In some cases existing architectural designs may circumvent widening the door to a full three (3) feet. This should be brought to the attention of the Waiver Case Manager at any time prior to authorization of the project.

Lever door hardware: Lever-type door hardware must always be used when individuals have limited hand/finger dexterity. In some cases the custom mounting of large “D” pull-type handles might be necessary to maximize one’s independence in opening and closing doors. For individuals with limited finger dexterity, locks for bedroom/bathroom doors should be the push-to-lock design.

Thresholds: When doorways are widened, thresholds should be kept to a minimum of ½ inch or less, to prevent a barrier for those individuals who use manual wheelchairs and/or shower chairs.

### **3. Interior Floor Surface Modifications**

Typically this means removing the existing carpet in certain essential areas of the home and replacing it with vinyl flooring. Sometimes this is done in conjunction with a complex bathroom modification to facilitate easier wheelchair maneuvering directly associated with the ADL related to personal hygiene and safety. **This modification is not intended to provide floor surface replacement for an entire home or use more expensive materials such as hardwood.**

#### **Obtaining Bids:**

- Any purchase up to \$2500.00 does not require securing competitive written bids.
- Any purchase from \$2500.00 to \$10,000 requires the verbal solicitation of three (3) different written bids. **A “no-bid” response is accepted as part of the solicitation process.**
- Any purchase over \$10,000.00 requires the written solicitation of bids, from various providers, and the project must be advertised following the procurement policy.

You should assist the family as needed in scheduling and arranging for written bids from contractors. When needed, three (3) written bids must be obtained and submitted to SCDDSN in accordance with State Procurement and SCDDSN Directive 250-08-DD for approval before any work can be authorized. If three written bids could not be obtained, you should submit any actual written bids received along with documentation of bid requests, to include a list of the contractors the family requested written bids from whom did not comply.

When a bid is received the **Acknowledgement of Bid Submission for Environmental Modifications (Community Supports Form 59)** must be completed and forwarded to the Provider/Contractor that submitted the bid. This must be done for each bid you receive. This communication notifies the provider/contractor that you have received their bid and they cannot proceed with beginning services without written authorization from you.

When the three (3) written bids are submitted, the costs for the modification should be entered into the Waiver Tracking System (S26). In all cases, the lowest bid must be indicated. In all cases, the award will be made to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder. If a bid is submitted from a contractor that has been debarred by the State of South Carolina Materials Management Office, then the bid will be dismissed and a new bid will have to be obtained.

If the individual/legal guardian has communicated concerns and issues about using the lowest bidder that involve possible bad references, proof of faulty work, complaints from the Better Business Bureau, etc. you must submit in writing the reasons and concerns that the individual/legal guardian has about the provider. SCDDSN Central Office staff will examine this information and if legitimate, documented and substantiated concerns are noted, the second lowest bidder can be used to complete the modification.

**Please Note:**

There is often a problem with written quotes being more than sixty (60) calendar days old. Since the cost of materials may vary from month to month, a bidder may not honor a written quote after thirty (30) or sixty (60) calendar days. You must assure all bids submitted to SCDDSN Central Office for review are current and valid. This may require contacting bidders for confirmation before submitting quotes to SCDDSN Central Office.

Once the request for the modification has been approved on the Waiver Tracking System, the individual/legal guardian must be presented with the **Environmental Modification Project Agreement (Community Supports Form 60)**, agree to its terms and sign it before services can be authorized. Once the form is signed, you can authorize the service.

**The participant may also choose to bypass the waiver funded Consultation and have the Professional Design Team (PDT) and the SCDDSN Engineering Division complete the specifications and follow procurement using State Funds. The Waiver Case Manager will complete the following steps:**

1. CM completes an Environmental Modification Pre-Assessment (EMPA).
2. CM sends the completed EMPA to the Central Office Waiver Coordinator, Jennifer Jaques, [jjagues@ddsn.sc.gov](mailto:jjagues@ddsn.sc.gov) who will review it for completion and need. If an update is needed on the progress of the modification, the CM will contact the Central Office Waiver Coordinator.
3. The Central Office Waiver Coordinator will forward the EMPA to the SCDDSN Engineering Division who will work with the PDT. The PDT or the Central Office Waiver Coordinator will contact the Waiver Case Manager to schedule a home visit. The CM will send confirmation of the date of the visit, in writing, to the family as a reminder. The contact information for the PDT should be included in case of a scheduling conflict.
4. If the PDT requests any additional information, the CM will gather and send it at least one week prior to the visit.
5. The PDT reviews the information provided, the Architect makes a phone call to the family the day of the visit to confirm appointment. If no contact can be made, the PDT will notify CM that they must reschedule. If appointment is confirmed, the architect will make a site visit to the participant's home to take measurements and photographs of the existing conditions.
6. The PDT will prepare a proposal for design services which will include an understanding of the scope of work along with preliminary project budget (including a 20% contingency). The proposal is then submitted to the SCDDSN Engineering Division for approval.
7. Upon approval, the PDT will prepare the abbreviated bid documents (design specifications) and transmit the specifications to the Central Office Waiver Coordinator, who will forward the documents to the CM to present to the Home Owner/Participant/Family.
8. The CM will deliver the design specifications to the family and family will sign off on the specifications and the Environmental Modification Project Agreement to confirm their support and agreement. Questions should be directed to the Central Office Waiver Coordinator via phone or SComm. The Central Office Waiver Coordinator will follow up with the SCDDSN Engineering Division and/or PDT, and notify the Waiver Case Manager of the outcome.
9. The SCDDSN Engineering Division will solicit bids for the work defined in the bid documents following DDSN procurement policy (DDSN Directive 250-08-DD).
10. Bids will be received and Acknowledgement of Bid Submission form will be sent to the bidders.

11. Once the bids are received the lowest bidder will be checked by the SCDDSN Engineering Division to ensure they are a “responsible bidder”. If information arises to put their credibility into question and, if justified, the next lowest bidder will be interviewed until a satisfactory bidder is found.
12. The project is awarded to the lowest responsible bidder via contract between the Contractor and SCDDSN.
13. Upon receipt of the signed contract and Contractor’s insurance certificates, the SCDDSN Engineering Division will notify the CM, the CM adds the amount to the budget and, once approved, authorizes the project. The authorization will be made out to the winning Contractor.
14. Upon completion of the work, review and approval by the SCDDSN Engineering Division, an invoice will be sent to Financial Manager and the Contractor will be paid.

**Note:** If the Contractor requests adjustments to the specs design specs, the Waiver Case Manager/Early Interventionist will be contacted and the work will stop until the adjustments can be addressed. The Waiver Case Manager/Early Interventionist will contact the Central Office Waiver Coordinator and the Contractor to address the proposed adjustments to the design specifications.

**Authorizing the Service:** If the chosen provider is enrolled with SCDHHS and wishes to bill Medicaid directly for the modification, the **Authorization for Services (Community Supports Form EM-36)** should be used. Include a copy of the authorized bid and the Environmental Modification consultation, if applicable, with the authorization.

If the chosen provider is not enrolled with SCDHHS **or** prefers to bill the DSN board for the service, the **Authorization for Service (Community Supports Form EM-8)** should be used. Include a copy of the authorized bid and the Environmental Modification consultation, if applicable, with the authorization.

**Please note:** If the individual/legal guardian desires Environmental Modifications above the individual cost limit and can secure external and separate funding for those additional modifications, they can **privately** contract with the same professional/contractor. Any additional work portion funded by the family or other outside resources cannot be a part of the written authorization. It must be a separate contract between the family and their chosen provider.

**Please note:** If any change is needed with the proposed modifications (change in specifications) during or after the solicitation of written bids, **the solicitation process must be stopped.** A written amendment of the specifications must be completed and sent to all potential bidders who received the original specifications, so each has opportunity to respond to the amended solicitation. All bidders must submit a written bid on the written amended specifications so we can assure bidding is on identical project requirements. A copy of the written amendment to the specifications and the subsequent bids must be submitted to Central Office for internal review.

**Please note:** If the individual enters the hospital before the modification is initiated by the provider, you must suspend the service until the individual exits the hospital using the **Notice of Suspension of Service (Community Supports Form 16-C).**

**Monitoring the Services:** You must monitor the effectiveness, benefits, and usefulness of the service along with the individual’s/family’s satisfaction with the service. **When the CM/EI completes the procurement process, the following guidelines also must be followed when monitoring Environmental Modifications.**

- On site monitorship of completed modifications to verify that the work is complete, adequate, and satisfactory to the family within **two weeks** of completion.

Some items to consider during monitorship include:

- Has the modification begun? Is the individual satisfied with the work that has been done so far? Does the provider show the individual courtesy and respect when working in his/her home?
- Once the modification is complete: Was the modification completed as originally prescribed?
- Is it functional?
- Is the individual satisfied with the end result of the modification?
- How has it made his/her home more accessible and safe?
- Was he/she satisfied with the provider of the modifications?
- Did the provider show up at scheduled times and respect the wishes of the individual and his/her family?
- Are there additional needs that were included in the bid and the authorized modification that were not met by the provider?

**Reduction, Suspension, or Termination of Services:** If services need to be reduced, suspended, or terminated, a written notice must be forwarded to the individual or his/her legal guardian. Include the details regarding the change(s) in service and the Reconsideration and Appeal Information. You must wait ten (10) calendar days before proceeding with the reduction, suspension or termination of the service. See **Chapter 8** for specific details and procedures regarding written notification and the appeals process.

## Release of Liability

**Please Type or Print**

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (SCDDSN) has implemented a process for Environmental Modifications wherein SCDDSN employees and/or contracted architects will complete the Environmental Modification Assessment and the procurement process. This process was implemented by SCDDSN in an effort to avoid negative outcomes from completed Environmental Modifications. The process will allow for trained professionals to manage the environmental modifications from start to finish.

As a waiver participant/Legal Guardian, you may choose to forgo this process and arrange for an Environmental Modification with an assessor who meets the provider qualifications outlined in the waiver manual. Your Waiver Case Manager will then work with you to complete the procurement process in order to obtain a contractor to complete the construction work.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as a waiver participant/legal guardian of waiver participant, have been made aware of the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs' (SCDDSN) internal process for completing an Environmental Modification. This process has been explained to me, and I have received a written copy of the SCDDSN Environmental process, as attached. I have chosen not to participate, and would prefer to move forward with an environmental modification based on specifications that have not undergone this process.

By signing this release, I agree that SCDDSN will not be held liable for the Environmental Modification, completed with the funds available to me through the Community Supports Waiver (CSW), since I did not avail myself of the SCDDSN Environmental Modifications process. I release SCDDSN of any and all liability which occurs due to the work of the contractor. I also agree that the quality of the contractor's work will not be the responsibility of SCDDSN.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant/Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Waiver Case Manager/Early Interventionist

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Attachment- Environmental Modification Chapter- CSW manual